WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for using a voice-messaging system to place local and long-distance telephone calls, comprising

   a voice-messaging system receiving a call placed by a user;

   verifying that the user is a valid user of the voice-messaging system;

   receiving from the user a request to place a telephone call;

   receiving from the user a telephone number of a third-party telephone line to be called; and

   placing a telephone call to the third-party telephone line associated with the third-party telephone number entered by the user.

2. The method as recited in claim 1, further comprising the step of connecting the telephone call to the third-party telephone line if the third-party telephone line is available.

3. The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the step of receiving a call placed by a user comprises receiving a toll-free call from the user.

4. The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the step of verifying that the user is a valid user comprises receiving and verifying a user-identification code and a password code.

5. The method as recited in claim 4, wherein the step of receiving a telephone number comprises receiving a long-distance telephone number to be called.

6. The method as recited in claim 5, wherein the user-identification code is associated with a billing account, and wherein the charges for the long-distance call are charged to the billing account.

7. The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the voice-messaging system allows the user to choose between accessing voice messages or placing a telephone call.

8. The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the voice-messaging system directs the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu if a third-party-call connection is not established.

1   9.   The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the voice-messaging system

2   directs the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu when the user enters a pre-defined

3   signal at any step during the process of placing a call to a third party.

1   10.   The method as recited in claim 2, wherein the step of connecting the

2   telephone call to the third-party number comprises establishing a 3-way call between the user,

3   the voice-messaging system and the third-party telephone line.

1   11.   The method as recited in claim 2, wherein the step of connecting the

2   telephone call to the third-party number comprises:

3   establishing a direct connection between the user and the third-party telephone

4   line; and

5   disconnecting the voice-messaging system from the call.

1   12.   The method as recited in claim 10, further comprising:

2   during or after the call between the user and the third party, receiving a pre-

3   defined signal from the user; and

4   transferring the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu.

1   13.   An article of manufacture, comprising:

2   a computer-usable medium having a computer-readable program-code means

3   embodied therein for causing a voice-messaging system to place local and long-distance

4   telephone calls, the computer-readable program-code means in said article of manufacture

5   comprising;

6   computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive a

7   call placed by a user;

8   computer-readable program means for causing a computer to verify

9   that the user is a valid user of the voice-messaging system;

10   computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive -

11   from the user a request to place a telephone call;

12   computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive

13   from the user a telephone number of a third-party telephone line to be called; and

14   computer-readable program means for causing a computer to place a

15   telephone call to the third-party telephone line associated with the third-party

16   telephone number entered by the user.

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14.   The article of manufacture as recited in claim 13, further comprising computer-readable program means for causing a computer to be connected to the third-party telephone line via the telephone call if the third-party telephone line is available.

15.   The article of manufacture as recited in claim 13, wherein the computer-readable program means for causing a computer to verify that the user is a valid user comprises computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive and verify a user-identification code and a password code.

16.   The article of manufacture as recited in claim 15, wherein the computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive a telephone number comprises computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive a long-distance telephone number to be called.

17.   The article of manufacture as recited in claim 16, wherein the user-identification code is associated with a billing account, and wherein charges for the long-distance call are charged to the billing account.

18.   The article of manufacture as recited in claim 13, further comprising computer-readable program means for causing a computer to provide the user a choice between accessing voice messages or placing a telephone call.

19.   The article of manufacture as recited in claim 13, further comprising computer-readable program means for causing a computer to direct the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu if a third-party call connection is not established.

20.   The article of manufacture as recited in claim 13, further comprising computer-readable program means for causing a computer to direct the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu when the user enters a pre-defined signal at any step during the process of placing a call to a third party.

21.   The article of manufacture as recited in claim 14, wherein the computer-readable program means for causing a computer to be connected to the third-party telephone line via the telephone call comprises computer-readable program means for causing a computer to establish a three-way call.between.the user, the voice-messaging system and the third-party telephone line.

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1   22.   The article of manufacture of claim 14, wherein the computer-readable

2   program means for causing a computer to be connected to the third-party telephone line via

3   the telephone line comprises computer-readable program means for causing a computer to

4   establish a direct connection between the user and the third-party telephone line; and

5   computer-readable program means for causing a computer to disconnect the

6   voice messaging system from the call.

1   23.   The article of manufacture as recited in claim 21, further comprising

2   computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive a pre-defined signal

3   from the user during or after the call between the user and the third party; and

4   computer-readable program means for causing a computer to transfer the user

5   back to a voice-messaging-system menu.